

December 24, 2016

Christmas Eve Service

PRAYER

May the words of my mouth be mediations of our hearts. Be always acceptable unto Thee. O Lord, our strength and our redeemer. AMEN

SERMON

Good evening! My name is Greg Hein. I'm the rector here. I love Jesus and I'm proud to be an Episcopalian. And I tell you this not because Bill James beat me to the punch. I tell you this for a couple of reasons. One some of you don't know me well or maybe not at all. And now you have a little bit of knowledge of who I am. I say it also because I am proud to be an Episcopalian. And I am proud of the tradition that we serve. I am proud to be a part of this part of what our presiding bishop Michael Curry calls the Episcopal branch of the Jesus movement. And I say that because that's what we're really celebrating tonight. Is that we are part of the Jesus movement and it started 2000 plus years ago. And what we celebrate this night is the birth of Christ. Whether December 25th is the actual day or not. It's the beginning of the Jesus movement. It's the beginning of God doing something new and exciting. Something that God was preparing humanity for for years. Many many years. To the fall of humanity wants the relationship that was created in creation was broken. We have a series of events of God interacting with humanity. Making covenants, making agreements, building relationship. Relationships on something external. A law that was given. I will be your God. You will be my people but to be my people you must live like this.

Here it is. Here is what I want you to do. I want you to love God. I want you to love one another. I want you to live a life that reflects being in a relationship with God so that the rest of the world can see what that is all about. And they will come to that light that shines in the Narthex. It was based on an external law. It was based on something that was outside of the people. And as much as they wanted to live out that covenant, as much as they wanted to follow that law, as a people they were incapable of doing that. They failed over and over again.

We have the Old Testament as the story of the attempts and the failures. But mixed in with that also is a prophecy. A prophecy that God to do something new, that God would do something different. Where the external law would be replaced by the indwelling of God's Holy Spirit in humanity. And it would be a person that was worn who would make that possible, who would make that happen. We celebrate the birth of Jesus. It's the beginning. It wasn't just God uniting with humanity and coming into the world.

It was everything that Jesus taught. It was everything that Jesus did. As he embraced humanity, as he tried to teach us about God's kingdom, about what it was like to be in that most intimate of relationship with God. As he lived that out, humanity and divinity together in this person. And from the time he was baptized by John until the time that he was crucified. He taught us, he embraced us, he loved us, he showed us what it was like to live with what God had created.

And just as the birth of Jesus was the beginning of this movement, the beginning of Jesus's journey in the world. Now is our beginning. We celebrated four weeks ago the beginning of the new church year. We go in a cycle in the Episcopal church and it starts with advent. It goes through the different seasons

until we end up with the season of Pentecost. Then we start again. Why do we do that? Because everything that Jesus said, and everything that Jesus did speaks to us. And it is the responsibility of the church and this community of faith to retell this story over and over again. Because we don't tell about something that happened just in the past. We don't tell about a life that lived and died and left us something good to remember. We celebrate a life that was lived that death took place and resurrection took place. The one that we celebrate tonight is not just a child who lived out a normal human life and died. But a life that is being lived today. And is reflected in those who have faith and reflected in those who loved God. And have heard the gospel of Jesus Christ and said yes. Yes, I see and understand that this the God who created. Yes, I see and understand that God loved us so much that he wouldn't let our own fault, our own sinfulness separate us forever from God.

And so, each year we walk that walk again. The walk that Jesus made in this world. And we listen again to the story, to the teachings, to the miracles. We do that each year because each year we hear it differently. Every year it makes a different impact on us because the circumstances of our life has changed. And as we come and listen and participate again it touches us in a different place. It has a deeper meaning. It has another way of showing us the love of God. And it's showing us that moves us to love God more. Moves us to try to love one another more.

So many times, we hear about the birth of Jesus and we hear what Isaiah said about the Prince of Peace. We hear so much about who God is and what God is about. And we look at the world and say why after all this time does it not reflect what Isaiah said, what Jesus said. About a world where we love and care about each other. Where wholeness is important, where there is peace, where there is war no more. Because we look at the world and we say he's not here yet. 2000 years is not here yet. What are we doing wrong?

What we're doing wrong is we don't always take to heart and we don't always understand that the world is changed. And it's changing. Every time you are changed by the gospel of Jesus Christ, every time you show love instead of hate, every time you choose peace instead of anger and conflict. You are changed. You have changed the path that you were traveling. And it might just be a little change but when you are changed then the world is changed just a little bit because you are part of this world. How do you respond to the people around you? How do you respond to God's call to you? If it changes you, it changes the world. And you've come into contact with and maybe just maybe as we are traveling through the year and hearing again the teachings. And we are touched to move closer to God. As we are moved to practice peace in our life more and more. As we choose to love instead of hate then we are changing the world just a little bit more. And the people you touch with the love of God. Maybe just maybe they are changed just a little bit. They are able to lay aside some of the hurt. Maybe they are able to forgive broken relationships. Perhaps they are able to reach out and lift someone else up from the brokenness that they have endured in their lives. And if that happens, the world has changed.

Maybe just a little part of it but it has moved that much closer to what God wants for us, to what God wants for the world. This night of celebrating the birth of Jesus is a beginning. A beginning of a walk. I invite you to take that walk again. No matter how long you have been a Christian. How long you've been a part of the church. I've been an ordained minister in the Episcopal church for 34 years. That's a lot of reading the scriptures on Sunday. That's a lot of preaching. But every time the story's touched me differently. Every time the sermon is different. Every time it's changing enough as I grow to know and understand God a little bit more. And try to pass on a little more understanding to the people who

come. I invite you to take a walk with me, come and listen to the story. And remember it's not about somebody in the past but about someone that is now in our hearts and in our lives. The one who has power, the one who loves, the one who creates wholeness out of brokenness. And in taking that walk again, come into that deeper love of God. So that you're life can be changed and in the changing of your life. The world comes one step closer to what our Lord and Savior called it to be. In place of peace and wholeness. And a place of abundance, a place where the love of God is the focus in humanity.